

Good afternoon Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Jen Warren, a person in sustained recovery since June 25, 2004.

I'm writing this to let you know how a sober house has helped to change my life. I started using alcohol and drugs at the age of twelve. I lived with both my parents and had a pretty good upbringing. As the years went on, the progression of my addiction got out of control. I had an accident and was prescribed painkillers. Shortly after starting that, I was introduced to methadone, heroin, and re-introduced to crack after seven years away from it. I ended up losing my daughter, my marriage, my home, jobs, my self esteem, and pretty much my will to live. I ended up living on the streets of Hartford. I would go between living in abandoned houses, under bridges, and if I was blessed enough, a shelter. I ended up in prison three times for prostitution, violation of probation, and stealing.

The final time I went to prison was June 25, 2004. I ended up going to a halfway house by the name of Next Step in Willimantic. There I learned about budgeting, taking care of myself, how to raise my self esteem, and began to learn about getting through life without "getting high." I started the process of getting my daughter back from DCF and when I went to meetings I started branching out. I ended up meeting very positive people in town and decided to stay in Willimantic. But after being in active addiction most of my 32 years of life, I still didn't have enough experience on how to live life the sober way. Then I met one of the people who owns a women's sober house here in town and became her first ever resident. It was just the stepping stone I needed to get my life on track. I continued to ride my bike to work 3.5 miles every day to my two jobs and continued to also to go to at least 7 meetings a week. I had the freedom to meet more people in recovery and learned how to do positive things like swimming, going to theme parks, volunteering, and spending time with my daughter. I also learned more about responsibilities such as paying rent, I got a car (legally), went to outpatient groups, did my own laundry, etc. I was learning first hand about responsibilities, and how life truly was. I had saved enough money and got my own apartment and got full custody back of my daughter. I am now a store manager at Dunkin Donuts, and I also work part time for C.P.A.S. in the area recovery houses. I still volunteer, go to at least 5 meetings a week, and spend a lot of time with my daughter. I am very active in her life, as she is in mine. She will be attending E.O. Smith next year for animal science and is an honor student. My life is so beautiful today I wouldn't change it for anything, except the better. I wouldn't have known life could be so good without the opportunity to go to the extra time at the sober house. It saved my life and gave my child a chance to have a mother. My brother died from this disease 5 years ago. I am so glad I had a second chance to live so that my parents do not lose another child.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on this extremely important issue. Please do not put a statute in place that may well jeopardize access to housing for persons who are striving to recover their lives and become productive members of society. Please consider working with DMHAS and the recovery community to accommodate community needs.